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ABSTRACT

Children's literature provides enjoyment, entertainment, creativity, understanding of self, and the ability to reason. In reading a book aloud, the teacher should encourage children to ask questions and to relate incidents that have happened to them that parallel those in the book. Unfamiliar words can be discussed by using a beginning dictionary with bright pictures. Once read, the stories can be turned into paintings, puppet shows, dramatic play, or music. Caution must be exercised, however, since words and phrases are frequently interpreted at their most literal meaning. Children from third through intermediate grades will see humor in some books, while preschool and primary school aged students may actually believe the concept as stated. Childhood stories can also be the medium for turning fearful shadows into recognizable and familiar shapes. Wordless picture books allow complete freedom for creating individual stories and for expansion of the child's vocabulary. (HOD)

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CHILDREN'S LITERATURE: AN ENHANCEMENT IN LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

Young children are in a period of tremendous language and concept development. Firsthand and vicarious experiences add to this rapid development. Children's literature, as a benefit in this area, must not be overlooked. Suggestions for use and recommended literary materials are offered in this discussion for preschool and primary teachers.

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CHILDREN'S LITERATURE: AN ENHANCEMENT
IN LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

A lifelong love affair with books is one gift every child should be given. The three good fairies in Sleeping Beauty, gave wondrous gifts to the little princess, to be sure, but none were so wondrous as those supplied by words. Words and pictures open worlds. Between the pages of each new book, a new experience is waiting. Watch the children's eyes open wide with excitement as they turn the front cover to reveal glorious colors and black print on crisp white pages. Tugboats and elephants, magical dragon and castles. Young children can't wait to identify the mysterious black shapes that turn into meaningful concepts as they learn to read.

The teacher has gifts to give: enjoyment, entertainment, creativity, understanding of self, and the ability to reason. Those gifts begin in the classroom with children's literature. When a teacher reads to a group of children, he or she can immediately turn this experience into an active one. Children can be encouraged to ask questions; to relate incidents that have happened to them which parallel those in the book; to discuss what is happening and try to decide what the outcome of the book might be. The teacher has the opportunity, too, to stop occasionally to discuss an unfamiliar word. By occasionally using a child's beginning dictionary with bright pictures, the children see a pattern emerge which will be of utmost value to them through school and beyond. A new word appears. Stop! Look it up in the dictionary. Continue reading. Beginning vocabularies are expanded effortlessly and continuously as a natural part of the reading process. On other occasions, the mere discussion of a word's meaning will be sufficient.

Books, once completed, are not "done and over with." Children read and reread dearly loved books. Completed books can provide a myriad of opportunities for continued learning in the classroom. They can be turned into paintings, puppet shows, dramatic play, or music. They serve in this way to spark latent creativity.

More simply, book reading experiences can be turned into discussion; into comparison of personal experience. The awakening realization of self can be a lonely time for a child. Do I look all right? Am I liked? If I hit another child, then how will he/she feel about me? The opportunity to identify with characters in a book and the resulting awareness of common experiences among peers is of great comfort and support during childhood development. A small group of children rereading a favorite story, for example, or a lone child thumbing through a book, should be encouraged to talk about things they like or about favorite characters. These purposeful oral discussions encouraged by the teacher will not only assist the children in developing a love for literature, but will help them express emotion and new vocabulary. As important as emotion, experiences will help them become aware of, through verbalization, thoughts they might not have been able to conceptualize by themselves.

It is necessary, however, to interject a note of caution. A wise teacher of young children will periodically question these new, awakening concepts. Resembling Amelia Bedelia,[1] youngsters frequently interpret words and phrases at their most literal level. Children from third through intermediate grades will see the humor in the Amelia Bedelia books, Fred Gwynne's The King Who Rained,[2] and Chocolate Moose for Dinner,[3] Edith Baer's Words are Like Faces[4] or Kohn's, What A Funny Thing to Say[5] while preschoolers and primary aged students may actually believe the concept as stated. The

difference between imagination and fact, fantasy and reality--critical thinking--must be introduced early, and is one of the most important, and sometimes difficult tasks to be mastered.

Children's literature presents another dimension over and above those previously discussed. Beside the colored illustrations, behind the new words is another benefit to learning: reducing fear and uncertainty. Most fears, afterall, stem from "not knowing." Childhood stories can be the medium for turning sometimes fearful shadows into recognizable, and therefore familiar shapes. Fear of the dark can be alleviated by changing its meaning in the minds of the children and by showing them they can master it. Ray Bradberry's vintage book, Switch on the Night[6] never loses its appeal and assurance by likening the night to a light switch. Fear of starting to school is addressed in numerous books which take the child step by step into this unknown adventure. Apprehension about a new baby, which usually is a fear of not being loved any longer, can be channeled into an opportunity to ge grown-up and be a helper. John Burningham's The Blanket[7] assures all children of the need for a favorite possession and parents' understanding and acceptance of their needs. Fears of desertion are addressed in Charlotte Zolotow's If You Listen[8] and Preston's Where Did My Mother Go?[9] in which the child deals with an absent father and gains assurance that mother can carry on the routines of life while providing love and understanding.

Children's literature contains another gift for the growing psyche: the concept "I am somebody; I can do things TOO." In addition to needing love and reassurance, children also want to do things for those they love. They want the best brought out in themselves. They want to turn their limitations into victories. Mercer Mayer and Elizabeth Winthrop answer just such needs in their portrayal of children's abilities and limitations

in Just for Yu You[10] and Are You Sad, Mama?[11] Karla Kuskin's Herbert Hated Being Small[12] and Jean Berg's Big Bug, Little Bug[13] deal with a child's size problems and final acceptance by others. The Tale of Tawny and Dingo[14] and A Bargain for Frances[15] by William Armstrong and Russell Hoban characterize strong friendship and overcoming even unsurmountable odds. While certain concepts and vocabulary sometimes seem too advanced in early education, they can be used as a catalyst to motivate children to higher levels of learning.

Most of the books discussed so far have been books containing print. The use of picture books, those which contain no or only a few words, provide perhaps the best spark for the children's individual creativity. The child stretches his imagination, reaches for that right word in his growing vocabulary and interacts verbally with the group. Most of Leo Lionni's books are of the easy picture-story book format and are loved by young children. A special favorite, dealing with color concepts, understanding, and friendship, is little blue and little yellow.[16] A film produced by McGraw Hill which can be rented through film libraries and audio-visual suppliers for $9.00 is an additional motivation. Rosie's Walk[17] and Just Like Everyone Else[18] have just a few words but many repetitive actions throughout each book. These allow children to master concepts while elaborating on the story line in an easy, relaxed manner. Pat Ross' Hi Fly[19] contains only four words and black and white ink drawings. Each child can create a delightful story from the pictures and will even "read" the words from a very young age. Each successful achievement encourages and motivates the child to strive toward another.

Wordless picture books allow complete freedom for creating individual stories and for expansion of the child's vocabulary. Recommended titles are: Apples,[20] Changes, Changes.[21] A Boy, A Dog, and A Frog,[22] Frog Goes

to Dinner,[23] Making Friends,[24] April Fools,[25] The Ballooning Adventures of Paddy Park,[26] and The Chicken's Child.[27] Two 1976 books deserve special discussion: Winter's The Bear and The Fly[28] and Turkle's Deep In The Forest.[29] Father Bear's compulsion to get rid of a fly which is disturbing the family's dinner in The Bear and The Fly, concludes in a demolished family, table, and room from which the fly departs unscathed. Turkles' book turns the story of The Three Bears around, and it doesn't take young children long to figure out this twist. Both of these books evoke great and hilarious responses, and preschoolers read these picture books by themselves. Art work in children's books such as these ranges from simple line drawings to bright multicolored pictures, each of which delight the eye and add to the joy of reading.

Pictures and words. Colors and concepts. First steps on what can be a never-ending road to the joy of learning. Teachers at preschool and primary grade levels help the children they teach take their first footsteps along that road. Like Sleeping Beauty, who was asleep until awakened by love's first kiss, the children awake to words--and give back to their teachers a gift equally as valuable as the one given to them. Eyes that were closed, now open wide with growing comprehension; hands that raise in eager response; laughter, delight in their newfound love of books and increased vocabulary.

Parish, Peggy, Amelia Bedelia, Harper & Row, 1963. $5.95

Gwynne, Fred, The King Who Rained, Windmill, 1970. $1.95

_____, A Chocolate Moose for Dinner, Windmill, 1976. $2.95

Baer, Edith, Words Are Like Faces, Pantheon, 1980. $4.95

Kohn, Bernice, What a Funny Thing to Say, Dial, 1974. $5.95

Bradberry, Ray, Switch on the Night, Pantheon, 1955. $4.99

Burningham, John, The Blanket, Crowell, 1976. $2.50

Zolotow, Charlotte, If You Listen, Harper & Row, 1980. $8.95

Preston, Edna Mitchell, Where Did My Mother Go? Four Winds Press, 1978. $7.93

Mayer, Mercer, Just for You, Western Publishing, 1975. $6.08

Winthrop, Elizabeth, Are You Sad, Mama? Harper & Row, 1979. $6.95

Kuskin, Karla, Herbert Hated Being Small, Houghton Mifflin, 1979. $6.95

Berg, Jean H., Big Bug Little Bug, Follett, 1964. $1.00

Armstrong, William H., The Tale of Tawny and Dingo, Harper & Row, 1979. $7.95

Hoban, Russell and Lillian, A Bargain for Frances, Harper & Row, 1970. $5.95

Lionni, Leo, little blue and little yellow, Astor Publish. Co., 1959. $7.95

Hutchins, Pat, Rosie's Walk, Young Readers Press, 1968. $6.95

Kuskin, Karla, Just Like Everyone Else, Harper & Row, 1959. O.P.

Ross, Pat, Hi Fly, Crown Publishers, 1974. $3.50

Hogrogian, Nonny, Apples, Macmillan, 1972. $4.95

Hutchins, Pat, Changes, Changes, Macmillan, 1971. $5.95

Mayer, Mercer, A Boy, A Dog, and A Frog, Dial, 1967. $3.95

_____, Frog Goes to Dinner, Dial, 1974. $4.50

Schick, Eleanor, Making Friends, Macmillan, 1969. O.P.

Krahn, Fernando, April Fools, Dutton, 1974. $6.95

Goodell, John, The Ballooning Adventures of Paddy Pork, Harcourt, 1969. $4.75

Hartelius, Margaret, The Chicken's Child, Doubleday, 1975. $5.95

Winter, Paula, The Bear and the Fly, Crown, 1976. $4.95

Turkle, Brinton, Deep In the Forest, Dutton, 1976. $5.95

Knaub, Linda (illust. Don Freeman) A Day Is Waiting, Viking, 1980. $8.95

Children's Literature and the Content Areas

Preschool and Primary Grades

Dr. Sally A. Chant

Suggested Projects

Math:

Use recipes from cookbooks especially designed for children to teach and use measurements.

Children devise garage sales using favorite objects from books. Students guessing the book may purchase the object. "Prices" assigned can be related to the book, e.g.: Winnie the Pooh--pot of honey--too much bother; Stregna Nona--pasta pot--three kisses.

Game boards making use of a spinner with numerals or a die teach children to count and associate number concepts.

Shape identification, as found in a book such as Changes, Changes, (Hutchins assist math at early years as well as for later geometric work.

Art:

Mixing of primary colors to form secondary colors.

Oral or written association of colors and personal feelings.

Poetry about colors--oral or written.

Read a book about clouds, stars, weather, etc.; observe these outdoors and then illustrate or write about what was seen or felt.

Copy art forms of various illustrators.

Art with geometric shapes--use overlays or templates to form pictures.

Make use of clay or playdough and have children make their impressions of animals and monsters.

Design a mix-up book.

From The Lace Snail by Betsy Byers or The Snowy Day by Ezra Jack Keats, create objects from snow as you would with sand. Paper doilies can be used indoors for another type of art project.

Construct animals, etc. from varied textured materials.

Reading:

Read table of contents, index and page numbers.

Identify display ads from newspapers and magazines.

Construct alphabetical collages.

Child wears a cardboard cutout of a character or holds a picture and "plays the part" or uses proper sequence when a specific part of the book is read, or story is told.

Sequencing of story.

Visual perception in likenesses and differences and in "picture reading."

Left to right concept through games, reading pictures, posters, and sequencing.

Music:

Rhythm of poetry or repetitive parts of stories can be "played" with rhythm band instruments, or "danced to" through body movements.

Create an original song from a poem or story.

Language Arts:

Each child interprets pictures in books and tells or writes the story from this interpretation.

Students act out parts from any type of literature.

Using toy telephones, students conduct a telephone conversation similar to one characters in a book would have.

Write a class letter or arrange a group phone call to a favorite author or illustrator.

Omit punctuation from favorite story lines or paragraphs illustrating the lack of sense without punctuation.

Use Amelia Bedelia and other books to demonstrate lack of understanding directions and multiple word meaning.

Language can be developed and enlarged through cooking experiences.

Act out stories or poems through puppets, shadow shows, or dramatic play.

Social Studies:

Map reading skills can be enhanced through game-board maps of characters moving through a story.

Book about other lands/cultures can be unified with a map or globe to locate the area.

Learn about other cultures through books: holidays, customs, food, music, hobbies, homes and language.

Use modern folktales to compare cultures.

Craft books will suggest unit construction projects.

Family organizations can be experienced from books containing varied family structures.

Values and self concept can be enhanced from realistic and fanciful literature books.

Travel and transporation projects are able to be examined.

Courtesy, respect, and other values are presented in literature.

Science:

Use books dealing with fog and other weather conditions as motivation for simple experiments.

Books on human and plant growth and the life cycle are elementary introduction to functions of plants and animals.

A Space Story by Karla Kuskin introduces children to the universe, and perhaps another universe.

The Pumpkin People by David and Maggie Cavagnaro describes vegetation cycle from beginning to end.

Proper clothing for varying weather conditions can be determined.

Mobiles for weather-related trade books or happenings of a character, scientist, etc. can be constructed.

Food and other category classification can be determined.

Animal sounds can be mimicked and learned.

Selected Bibliography

Math:

Inch by Inch, Leo Lionni
The Bear's Counting Book, Robin & Jocelyn Wild
Clocks in the Woods, Leon Steinmetz

Art:

Little Blue and Little Yellow, Leo Lionni
Hailstones and Halibut Bones, Mary O'Neil
Dandelion, Ladeslov Svatos

Values:

This Thumbprint, Ruth Kraus
Strega Nona, Tomi DePalo (also Weston Woods film)
What Do You Say Dear? Sesyle Joslin
The Little Old Man Who Could Not Read, Irma S. Black
Great Thumbprint Drawing Book, Ed Emberly
Drawing Book of Animals, Ed Emberly
The Giving Tree, Shel Silverstein
Are You Sad, Mama? Elizabeth Winthrop
Mr. and Mrs. Thief, Naomi Kojima
Frog and Toad are Friends, Arnold Lobal

Information books:

Dictionary at primary levels
Junior Thesaurus
Wheels and Noise, Wonder Book, no author
Cars and Trucks, Preschool Puppet Board Books, Illust. T. Izawa
Red Light, Green Light, Golden MacDonald
The First Book of Space Travel, Jeanne Bendick
Charlotte's Web, E. B. White

Language Arts:

Amelia Bedelia, Peggy Parish
The King Who Rained, Fred Gwynne
Chocolate Moose for Dinner, Fred Gwynne
Words, Words, Words, Words, Illust. Judith H. Corwin
What Does the Rooster Say, Yoshio? Edith Battles

Poetry:

Bronzeville Boys and Girls, Gwendolyn Brooks
Moments, Lee Bennett Hopkins
Something Special, Beatrice S. DeRegniers & Irene Haas
Hey-How for Halloween, Lee Bennett Hopkins

Children's Cookbooks:

More Than Graham Crackers, Wanamaker, Hern, and Richarz
Kids Are Natural Cooks, Parent's Nursery School
Cooking and Eating with Children, McAlfee, Haines, and Young
Peanuts Cook Book, Jane Dutton
The Little Witch's Black Magic Cookbook, Linda Glovach
The Pooh Cook Book, Virginia Ellison
The Little House Cookbook, Barbara M. Walker

Picture books: (with & without words)

Just Like Everyone Else, Karla Kuskin
The Magic Blanket, Stella Farris
Deep In the Forest, Brinton Turkle
The Sky Was Blue, Charlotte Zolotow
Hi Fly, Pat Ross
Where Did My Mother Go? Edna M. Preston

Social Studies:

Stop That Ball, Mike McClintock
Encyclopedia Brown, Donald Sobol
Tari Dog, Svend Otto
Nate the Great Solves Them All, Marjorie Sharmat
The Funny Little Woman, Arlene Mosel

Self Concept:

Me, Barbara Crane
The Blanket, John Burningham
Herbert Hated Being Small, Karla Kuskin
William's Doll, Charlotte Zolotow
A Friend Is Someone Who Likes You, Joan W. Anglund
The Tale of Tawny and Dingo, William Armstrong
Just For You, Mercer Mayer
Big Bug, Little Bug, Jean H. Berg

Science:

The Wind Blew, Pat Hutchins
Pagoo, Holling C. Holling
The Tenth Good Thing About Barney, Judith Viorst
Sam, Bangs, and Moonshine, Evaline Ness
Look Again, Tana Hoban
The Tiny Seed, Eric Carle

Miscellaneous non literature materials:

Newspapers and magazines
Packaging materials from food products
Telephone directories
Catalogues